Ways to Protect Your Mental Health

Take Control of Your Mental Health in 2020

Adopting strategies to protect your mental health, or to prevent it from worsening, may help you become more comfortable with uncertainty and what is beyond your control. Such practices will make you and those around you stronger, such as your loved ones and community. Here are some tips on how to strengthen your mental health throughout the COVID-19 crisis:

#1 Take time to reflect on your own feelings — Social distancing and working from home can be a lot to handle, but there is a bright side — It offers you the time to focus on yourself. Use this time to understand how you're feeling and know that it's okay to feel fear, sadness, frustration, confusion, loneliness or guilt.

#2 Stick to your old routines as much as possible — Continue to abide by your normal routine by maintaining pre-quarantine habits. For instance, if working from home is new to you, begin each work day the same way you would without actually heading into the office. When experiencing constant change, having some familiarity in your daily activities can make life feel more manageable.

#3 Go outside — Yes, you can go outside while taking precautionary measures like social distancing and wearing a mask. If you find yourself dwelling on the negatives and can't stop, go for a walk around the neighborhood and visit the closest green space. Research says that exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally and mentally, it also contributes to your physical well-being.

#4 Focus on things you can control — Do your best to focus on ensuring the safety of yourself and those around you – something you do have control over. That means washing your hands often, covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, avoiding touching your face and non-essential travel, wearing a mask when outside your home, and keeping your immune system strong by maintaining a healthy diet, an exercise routine and a solid 6 to 8 hours of sleep.

#5 Embrace the uncertainties and focus on the positive things — 'What will happen next? Will the grocery shelves ever be restocked with toilet paper? How long will we be stuck at home? When will this all end?' As hard as it may be, try not to obsess over these types of questions. Instead, concentrate on the positive and uplifting moments like the Italians singing from their windows and balconies or the acts of love and kindness taking place in your own community.

#6 Stay connected — Don't isolate yourself. Loneliness can be as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Stay in touch with family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Don't just text – skype, call, email, or any other form of digital communication. Check in on how they're doing, let them know how you are doing. Offer all of your love, support and encouragement.

#7 Count your blessings — Be thankful for your health, body and that of your friends and family. Thank the brave frontline workers – medical professionals, grocery store clerks, truck drivers, restaurant workers, warehouse workers, garbage and sanitation workers – the true heroes of this pandemic, who are serving you and your community.

#8 Turn off the news — Limit your media intake, that includes your local news channel and social media. Stay informed about what's happening through reliable sources, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

#9 Seek professional help — If you find that you need professional help, consider services like BetterHelp and Talkspace, which allow you to communicate with mental health professionals through digital messaging. Take advantage of online resources and hotlines too. Your medical carrier may provide a hotline to help deal with the stresses you're facing. You can also utilize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990.